

Introduction – Mayor Barney

Hello, I'm Mayor Gail Barney and it is my honor to introduce Queen Creek's State of the Town. I think we can all agree that 2020 was a bit different – and so is our State of the Town. Instead of gathering in person with our family, friends and regional partners to celebrate the successes we enjoyed in 2020, we are presenting them virtually. This is just one example of the impact of COVID-19.

The international pandemic has impacted everyone, and I'd like to extend my thoughts to those who have lost a loved one or are experiencing hardships. While COVID-19 brought many challenges for all of us, I'd like to highlight some of the ways the Queen Creek community became stronger together during the past year...

The Town, like many other municipalities, worked closely with our neighboring communities, counties and the state to provide ongoing updates – communication is critical during these types of events.

We also took the opportunity to evaluate how we could use our resources efficiently during the pandemic. For example, while Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre was closed over the summer, our operations staff assisted the streets department with various projects like clearing weeds, regrading retentions and hauling concrete. Using Horseshoe Park staff instead of contracted services, the Town saved approximately \$77,000. Horseshoe Park staff also saved the Town approximately \$25,000 by building and installing a new rail fence, instead of contracting out the work.

We have fantastic businesses here in Queen Creek, but before I turn it over to the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce President, Chris Clark, I'm excited to highlight one of my favorite topics – the people!

- In 2020, our community members donated nearly 45,000 hours of service, saving taxpayers approximately \$1.2 million dollars!
- In 2020, we celebrated quite the milestone with Lori Lehman, our Human Resources Specialist, being the first Town employee to reach 25 years of service – thank you, Lori for your continued commitment to serving this community!
- Speaking of service, we have seen our healthcare professionals go above and beyond responding to COVID-19. As a Town, we had the honor of participating in the recognition of our healthcare heroes at Banner Ironwood. What you're about to see is just a small portion of the efforts to thank our dedicated healthcare professionals – which was featured on CBS News and NBC Universal, in addition to our local news...

VIDEO – Healthcare Heroes

QC Chamber – Chris Clark

Quality Lifestyle – Vice Mayor Oliphant

We love our local businesses!

I'm excited to share a number of new businesses opened, Barrio Queen, Old Navy, Black Rock Coffee, Dutch Brothers Coffee, Trader Joe's, and the QC Botanical Gardens, to name a few.

While our Town Center continues to flourish, so does our Agritainment District! In 2020, the remaining acreage of Schnepf Farms was annexed bringing the entire property into the Town and expanding our Agritainment district. This project achieved many of the goals detailed in the Town's master plans,

further solidifying the Town as the Agritainment capital of Arizona. The project wasn't just exciting to us, it received the Honorable Mention Award from the Arizona Chapter of the American Planning Association!

The Schnepf family has a lot of history in Queen Creek - Mark Schnepf is part of one of our founding families, he is a founding father and our first Mayor— I can't think of anyone who better embraces the spirit of Queen Creek...

Video – Founding Father

That certainly highlights the great quality of life we enjoy here in Queen Creek!

Our parks and trails are definitely at the heart of this community – in 2020:

- A new trailhead was completed to access the Sonoqui Wash at Power Road;
- Improvements were made to the splash pad at Founders' Park, one of our very popular amenities; and
- Our grounds staff continue to work hard to ensure our parks and trails are safe and beautiful.

Mansel Carter Oasis Park added two more awards, the Grand Award in special projects and the best large project award, both from the American Council of Engineering Companies.

Speaking of awards, Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre and Roots 'N Boots Queen Creek were awarded 1st place for Best Footing from the Women's Professional Rodeo Association in the Turquoise Circuit.

Our special events are a staple of the community – this year they looked a little different. Thanks to the creativity of our staff and engagement from the community, we continued to offer unique QC experiences through:

- The Easter Bunny Adventure, a parade through the neighborhoods;
- Ice Cream Social Week, with virtual updates from the various Town divisions;
- A modified Founders' Month with drive-in watch parties, community scavenger hunts, a "Live" stock experience along the QC Wash and of course, a virtual Battle of the Badge;
- Touch-A-Truck became a virtual View-A-Vehicle series highlighting our field staff and the equipment they operate; and
- Our modified Trunk or Treat month included pumpkin, costume, pet and house decorating contests, and my personal favorite – HayQC – a chance to get into the fall spirit while also supporting our local businesses!
- Our Recycling Events added increased safety measures with an advance registration process that kept traffic moving smoothly for nearly 500 participants in November which resulted in 22 tons of materials diverted from the landfill.
- And you still have time to participate in Cupid's Quest! Checkout our Recreation Facebook page for details on where to find cupid through Valentine's Day!

We also got creative with how we engaged our Senior Program participants from delivering toilet paper to zoom calls and regular check-ins!

After sharing all of this, it shouldn't be a surprise that our Recreation Supervisor Erica Perez was recognized by the National Parks and Recreation Association! Erica was recognized by NBCUniversal's Peacock Network in Honor of Parks & Recreation Treat Yo'Self Day – she even got to virtually meet Gerry from the show, Parks & Recreation!

What better way to close quality of life than to revisit my favorite battle of the badge from 2020...

VIDEO – Battle of the Badge

Secure Future – Council member Brown

We certainly appreciate our public safety folks!

Ensuring a secure future takes many forms – including welcoming new residents and businesses to Queen Creek! In 2020, the Town issued 1,985 single-family home permits, the largest number of housing permits issued in the history of the Town. Including commercial and retail, the Town permitted an estimated \$848 million in construction value and processed nearly 6,000 permits and applications, all while maintaining current staffing and consistent quality customer service, keeping projects on schedule and ensuring quality and safe development in the community.

The Town also processed 271 business licenses, a 50% increase from 2019. And we completed a rezoning of the area west of Ellsworth Road to allow land designated for residential homes to be converted to commercial uses. This area will serve as a transition between the Downtown core and adjacent residential communities.

Speaking of the Downtown core, we are excited to welcome the Placemaking and Arts Task Force for the Downtown Core. The purpose of the committee is to encourage arts in the downtown, helping shape the physical and social character. Just north of downtown, we celebrated the grand opening of the Town's first hotel! We are thrilled to welcome Hampton Inn to the QC community!

We also saw new industrial development at the Power Marketplace Business Park and an expansion at Banner Ironwood Medical Center, including a 60,000 square-foot medical office and two new floors with 36 additional beds at the hospital.

The success of our businesses also plays an important role in creating a secure future. The Town was at the forefront of implementing support for our businesses in response to the pandemic:

- We waived business license and renewal fees for fiscal year 2021;
- We provided flexibility on temporary signs for commercial businesses;
- We allowed restaurants to extend their outdoor dining even prior to the Governor's executive order;
- We encouraged the community to support local businesses through the Queen Creek Together campaign, which included sharing business specials, a partnership with HOWND, and implementing the Small Business Grant Assistance program. In 2020, we assisted more than 100 businesses through more than \$400,000 of direct support!

With these efforts, in addition to the team's ongoing work, it is no surprise that our Economic Development Department was recognized by the Arizona Association of Economic Development as the Medium Organization of the Year!

We are fortunate to have outstanding staff and local businesses – let's hear from some of those businesses...

VIDEO – Businesses

Access to, and conservation of, water is also an integral component of a secure future. Last year we began a water conservation program monitoring the usage of HOAs, which are some of the largest users of water. We anticipate HOAs being able to save 5-10% of water usage as a result of the program.

Not only do we want to conserve water, we also want to efficiently store and manage our water, which is one of the many benefits of this impressive Meridian Water Storage Facility.

VIDEO – Water Storage

Superior Infrastructure – Council member Turley

Talk about a superior piece of infrastructure – and we are in the process of constructing a second large water storage tank in the northeast area of the community!

As a Town, we are committed to providing superior infrastructure for our residents and businesses, while ensuring we are making strategic public investments for today and the future. We continue to invest in our utility system to ensure safe water and efficient wastewater. For example, we constructed 17 miles of utility lines, constructed or improved a number of well sites throughout our service area and enhanced our water system infrastructure with the acquisition of the Diversified Water Company. The acquisition added more than nine square miles and 1,800 customers to our water service area. It also added four wells and four storage tanks.

Of course, I can't talk about superior infrastructure without talking about our extensive roadway improvements!

In 2020, we made a number of enhancements at major intersections. These improvements include state-of-the-art technology and safety features and we added four new intersections throughout Town.

And we are maintaining our commitment to Better Roads Ahead! For those looking for information about specific roadway projects in Town, I invite you to visit our fantastic capital improvements webpages at QueenCreek.org/BetterRoadsAhead. There you'll find complete details, including timelines, for the many projects we're working on to improve transportation in the community.

We are continuing progress on the Rittenhouse Road improvements – this is a major roadway improvement project spanning more than four miles! We are nearing completion of the project, which will result in Rittenhouse being two lanes in each direction all the way through Queen Creek! This project included a number of partners and is a significant roadway for the region.

A major component of the project was widening the bridge over the Queen Creek Wash – let's take a look...

VIDEO – Rittenhouse

We also completed a new bridge over the Queen Creek Wash at Meridian Road, which allowed us to extend Meridian Road south to Combs Road, creating an important north-south connector in that area of Town.

On the west side of Town, we broke ground on the Chandler Heights improvements from Sossaman to Power. This project will widen the two-lane roadway to five lanes and is just phase one of the project. This year, we will continue the Chandler Heights improvements west to Recker and the Power Road improvements north to Brooks Farm.

And last but not least, the new roadway behind me... the Signal Butte extension, another important north-south connector! Let's take a closer look...

VIDEO – Signal Butte

Safe Community – Council member Benning

The Signal Butte Road extension was instrumental in the opening of Fire Station 4, this amazing new facility I'm standing in! Our Queen Creek Fire & Medical plays a key role in creating a safe community – and they were quite busy in 2020!

Queen Creek's first ladder truck was placed into service. Strategically located at Fire Station 1, Ladder 411 will provide enhanced protections for the community. Our crews have completed extensive training to operate the new apparatus, which will be essential as Queen Creek welcomes more multi-story buildings, including our first hotel!

Opening Station 4 brought our total number of in-service fire stations to five – let's get a quick tour from Chief Gray...

Video – Fire Station 4

Of course, to operate five fire station, we need firefighters! In 2020, the recruit class of 2020-2 graduated, with 13 new firefighters joining QC Fire & Medical.

In partnership with Maricopa County, our firefighters hosted two flu shot clinics. Maricopa County Public Health provided the vaccines at no cost and our fire department administered them.

We also partnered with Vitalant to host monthly blood drives. Vitalant is the sole blood provider for Banner Ironwood, and every hospital in Maricopa County - Vitalant supplies 60 hospitals in Arizona. Through the generosity of the region, our monthly blood drives resulted in 345 blood donations, a 366% increase from 2019!

While our fire department is focused on the safety of the community, we are also focused on their safety. In working with two medical providers, we developed early detection cancer screenings for our fire and medical staff.

And our efforts to improve wellbeing do not stop with our staff - our 2020 charity campaign raised more than \$21,000 for non-profits.

To help ensure a safe community during COVID-19 while also continuing to provide essential services, our staff:

- Designed and installed plexiglass barriers inside Town facilities;
- Enhanced cleaning of Town facilities;
- And worked to ensure staff have the necessary personal protective equipment to safely perform their various functions for the community.

As you can see, providing a safe community entails many areas. Before Council member Wheatley shares our law enforcement highlights, let's take a look at a video prepared by students at the Queen Creek American Leadership Academy reminding people to drive to arrive...

Video – D2A ALA

Safe Community – Council member Wheatley

I love it when we work with our local schools! Our MCSO Queen Creek deputies are also reminding us to drive to arrive! They established traffic enforcement details to target high collision areas and implemented ATV patrols in our washes.

Our deputies found creative ways to connect with the community during COVID-19 including:

- Public safety parades throughout our neighborhoods;
- A Facebook Live video touring the station;
- Graduation parades;
- And McGruff the Crime Dog visited more than 200 residents from a safe distance in a single day!

We are fortunate to have amazing public safety personnel serving us through our contract with the Sheriff's Office and will continue to be serviced by them until early 2022. At that time, we will officially transition to the Queen Creek Police Department!

In late 2019, we reviewed a comprehensive law enforcement study. In early 2020, we asked you, our community, for input on the topic and we so appreciate your response. Through a variety of outreach methods, we received 354 feedback forms, we reached 405 people in-person, with nearly 176,000 impressions on social media and 2.6 million reached through traditional media coverage. The community overwhelmingly responded that it was time for us to create our own police department. After careful consideration, as a Council, we unanimously approved to establish the Queen Creek Police Department at our March 18 meeting.

And it's been a busy nine months! We hired our first Chief of Police, Randy Brice who has been working hard to create a police department founded on serving with compassion, respect and trust. Creating a police department includes so many components, it has touched every aspect of our organization!

From conducting the steps to be an officially recognized police department, establishing a logo, badge and vehicle design, and planning for recruitment! We've begun the purchasing process for major equipment including vehicles, network hardware, weapons and ammunition, and purchased our records management system that will manage the day-to-day operations and much more for the new department.

Hopefully you're following us on social media, so you've seen Chief Brice on his various adventures – from riding Peaches the mule through the QC Wash to reading children's books and volunteering in the community – he truly is embracing the philosophy of community-oriented policing!

And we've been working with just about everyone to develop the many partnerships and intergovernmental agreements needed prior to January 2022.

We also welcomed our command staff, Lieutenants Noah Johnson and Mark Newman and Senior Administrative Assistant Tina Brinkman to the team! And we are in the midst of our recruitment for all of our remaining sworn positions. It has been an incredible journey so far and we are so excited for what's to come. While I could try and convince you to come work for our new QCPD, I think I'll let Chief Brice take it from here...

Video – QCPD Overview

Effective Government – Representative Hoffman

Wow, our very own Queen Creek Police Department, what an incredible time in Queen Creek's history.

It has been an absolute pleasure over the last four years to serve the people of Queen Creek, to serve you on the Queen Creek Town Council.

Watching my fellow council members and I come together to solve big problems and do great things for the people that we represent. It has truly been an honor.

2020 was a hard year, honestly, it sucked. With Coronavirus, there was economic devastation, there was hardship. We had Queen Creek citizens that struggled with loss of jobs, losing their businesses, or fighting to save those businesses. Whether you were hit hard, or you were hit less hard, it was a tough year for everybody.

Queen Creek did it differently. Queen Creek provided all of our essential services while still reducing our budget by over 10%, what an incredible accomplishment to have a balanced budget and to prove to our citizens that it's not just government that's essential, it's you. We take that responsibility very seriously.

That's not the only fiscally responsible thing that we did in 2020...

- We also took over the maintenance of streetlights from SRP, which will save property owners in our street light improvement districts an aggregate annual total of \$400,000.
- We were also able to pay off two loans early, saving \$2.6 million in interest.
- We refinanced debt related to water with long-term WIFA financing, and water sure is important to use in Arizona. When we did this, we got low fixed-interest rates of 1.98% over 30 years, which is some of the cheapest you can get.

Many of you know how passionate I am about fiscal responsibility, and it has been an honor to close my role on the Queen Creek Council sharing these highlights. As I move into my role with the State Legislature, I am excited to watch the future progress and to partner with the Town and all of our council members, including our newest member, Council member Leah Martineau.

Effective Government – Council member Martineau

Thank you, Representative Hoffman. Working collaboratively with the various levels of government is a key component of being an effective government and we look forward to working with you in your new role!

Speaking of partnerships – in 2020, the Town worked with Pinal County Supervisor Goodman's Office and local faith-based organizations to coordinate a food drive with the United Food Bank, collecting nearly 24,300 pounds of food for regional residents in need.

The Town also partnered with Maricopa County to open 1.3 miles of new trails at Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre – let's take a look...

VIDEO – HPEC Trails

The Town also worked with the Maricopa Association of Governments on a number of items including:

- Submitting 54 transportation projects to the Maricopa Association of Governments Regional Transportation Plan, which covers the next 20+ years.
- And securing funding –
 - \$45,000 to optimize the Town Center area signals for weekend operations; and
 - \$1.8 million to complete Town-wide upgrades for all signalized intersections.

Beyond partnerships, an effective government continues to seek opportunities for innovation and engagement.

- Development Services customers now have full use of our online platform to submit plans electronically, saving them and the Town considerably on printing costs and in-person visits, and allowing real-time project status updates. A byproduct is significantly reducing our reliance on paper.
- Advancing the use of e-signatures across the organization also reinforces the Town's paperless initiative and enhances remote work efforts.

And finally, like many other communities across the nation, the Town adjusted Census outreach efforts as a result of the pandemic. A special thank you to our complete count committee, community leaders who volunteered their time to help increase the community's participation – they were quite busy and successful! The Town's self-response rate was 70.1%, which exceeded both national and state averages. The Town was fortunate to work with American Leadership Academy and the Queen Creek Unified School District on two outstanding videos – let's take a look at the QCUSD video...

VIDEO – QCUSD Census

Closing – Mayor Barney

Our youth are just fantastic!

While 2020 had its challenges, I think we can all agree it also had some outstanding successes – and we are looking forward to what's ahead in 2021...

- From the opening of Fat Cats, a major family entertainment venue, and EOS Fitness, to the groundbreaking of Fry's Marketplace at Ellsworth and Riggs, we are excited to see QC continue to be a destination for new businesses.

- We are continuing work towards Better Roads Ahead with four new roadway projects starting construction and two more completing design.
- And we will celebrate some major milestones for public safety – the groundbreakings of permanent fire stations 2 and 5 and continued progress towards our very own Queen Creek Police Department.

Thank you for celebrating our State of the Town, and to everyone who helps make Queen Creek such a fantastic place – we are stronger together!